



Northwest Regional Office



NOAA Fisheries

National Marine Fisheries Service

Wildfires and the Endangered Species Act

Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) requires all federal agencies to consult with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) on any action they fund, authorize, or carry out that may affect ESA listed salmon or steelhead or their critical habitat. Consultation normally must be completed before any action can proceed, but there are exceptions for emergencies, such as wildfires.

Wildland fires are an emergency under the Endangered Species Act and are not subject to the usual “take” prohibitions. Human safety always comes first in emergencies. We take advantage of flexibilities in the ESA to ensure that response activities are never delayed or obstructed because of listed fish.

NMFS and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) have developed joint procedures for dealing with ESA issues in emergencies. These procedures have been communicated to other federal agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), which are involved with emergency situations such as wildfires. The process as described in a joint NMFS/USFWS *Consultation Handbook* is:

- Agency supervisors dealing with an emergency that may affect listed fish or critical habitat notify NMFS.
- NMFS staff make recommendations to agency supervisors on how to minimize effects of the emergency responses.
- As soon as possible after the emergency is under control, agency supervisors initiate formal ESA consultation with NMFS.

NMFS also is working closely with USFS and BLM to expedite consultations on wildland fire management actions taken under the National Fire Plan. The Fire Plan is designed to reduce the risk of wildfires to communities and restore burned areas. NMFS has hired and trained 36 additional salmon habitat biologists and opened four new field offices close to USFS and BLM project sites to allow NMFS to be more responsive to consultation needs for the National Fire Plan. Our new biologists are working out of Salmon and Grangeville, Idaho; Ellensburg, Wash.; and La Grande, Ore.

Our new staff and locations will help NMFS develop partnerships not just with fellow federal agencies, but with local communities as well, so we can integrate fire activities with salmon protection and the Endangered Species Act. We’re dedicated to helping local communities avoid wildfire risks while improving ecosystem health.